

## Minutes - January 14, 2026

### CLUB BUSINESS

**President Gary Fitzpatrick** called the meeting to order at 10 am, welcoming everyone to Newcomers' first 2026 meeting. He noted that folks in attendance represent an "exceptionally large group" and speculated that the high attendance (more than 120 people) was due to the guest speaker, Grand Junction City Manager Mike Bennett.

Since no December meeting was held, **President Gary** asked for comments or corrections to the November meeting minutes. Hearing neither, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes as is. **Ruth Anna** so moved, **Marilyn Drury** seconded, and the minutes were approved by acclamation. He thanked **Tanya Davis** for the great spread of treats, adding that this month she was a one-person Hospitality Committee, baking everything herself. He also acknowledged several January birthdays among members in attendance.

**Treasurer Bill Gates** reported that the club's finances "are in good shape." As of the end of 2025, the Newcomers checking account held \$4,723.73, with \$.51 in interest, and the certificate of deposit stood at \$5,431.18. He added that additional bills have been paid since these end-of-year figures.

**Karen Dreher** of We Care said she sent cards to **Janet and Ed Hokanson**, whose son passed away; **Lynne O'Connell**, who's undergoing cancer treatment; **Franz Huber**, who had hip replacement surgery, and **Sara Hermundstad**, who had knee replacement surgery.

The Membership Committee's **Jean Greenfield** named several meeting visitors -- starting with those who she described as "escapees from Colorado's Front Range" -- Robert and Tabitha Stewart from Centennial; Scott Mercer and Cindy Bolen from Littleton; Shelley Stamm from Arvada; Richard and Lisa Arate from Greeley and Will Trump from Parker. Don Johnson from Albuquerque was the only non-escapee visitor.

Newsletter editor **Dale Gates** called attention to the newsletter's new design and format, which debuted in the January issue. With the new design, she said, the newsletter now matches the club's website and other materials, making for a more cohesive brand image. **President Gary** said that the newsletter is the latest communication tool to be folded into an overall year-long rebranding initiative for the club. He thanked **Pat Perrin** for spearheading the process, working with Jorde Matthews, local graphic and web designer and owner of Be Someone Design.

**Stacie Hawkins** and **Molly Fitzpatrick** conducted the monthly raffle before the meeting's adjournment.

## **CLUB EVENTS**

**Terie Furtney** and **Barb Hofecker**, who orchestrated the Newcomers Holiday Party in December, gave a brief update. The event was well attended, they noted, and fun to pull together. In particular, Barb said, they appreciated that many people volunteered to help make the party happen -- from making centerpieces for the tables and silent auction to setting up the dining area to cleaning up after the event. "In other events we have organized, I don't remember that many people pitching in to help," Barb said. Several of the member-created centerpieces were sold through a silent auction at the party, raising \$250 to donate to the Community Food Bank.

**Douglas Grodt**, who organizes monthly Newcomers "easy hikes for seniors," said the hikes offer a great opportunity for club members with a New Years resolution to get more exercise. He said the January 15 hike will begin at 10 am, hiking around the Kindred Reserve Open Space Park on South Broadway, near Tiara Rado Golf Course. Newcomers interested in getting information on future monthly hikes can email Douglas at [newcomerhikers@gmail.com](mailto:newcomerhikers@gmail.com) and he will add your name to his email distribution list, which currently includes about 160 people.

**Susan Fournier** of the Tour and Lunch team said that on January 22 at 11 am, members who sign up will tour Clark & Co's Distilling, 3926 US-6 in Palisade, followed by lunch in the distillery's dining area. The Clark & Co representative said they can accommodate 40 people. If that many folks sign up, he will recruit staff to ensure that their customer service is timely.

**Susan** also indicated that she's been helping to coordinate both Tour and Lunch and Armchair Travelers programs (see Community Events for Armchair Travelers info) for two years, and would like to step down from Tour and Lunch. That program operates from September-May each year, with a four-person team of Newcomers volunteers, each making arrangements for two tours during that time.

**Bill Gates**, also on the Tour and Lunch team, said the February tour will take place on February 19 at 10 am at the Ute Water treatment facility, 2190 H-1/4 Road. The facility serves more than 80,000 customers in Grand Junction, Fruita, Palisade, Loma and Mack, and is noted for its unique gravity-fed system. Major infrastructure facilities, including water treatment plants, require that visitors have background checks, for security purposes. People who want to take part in the tour must sign up one week in advance, provide information to identify themselves and pay \$6.85 per person for the cost of the clearance review.

## **COMMUNITY EVENTS**

**Stan Zygmunt**, Newcomers member who volunteers for New Dimensions Lifelong Learning Institute, announced that the winter-spring term is approaching. As it celebrates its 10th anniversary of providing high-quality courses on a wide variety of topics, New Dimensions continues to expand. The winter-spring class catalog -- featuring 107 classes, including 60 new ones -- went online today at [newdimensionsgj.org](http://newdimensionsgj.org). Class registration will run from January 19-26, and classes will be held February 2-March 20. (Different classes have different times. See class catalog for specifics.) Stan added that Midday with New Dimensions, free one-hour noontime lectures open to the public, will offer a presentation on "The Great Chicago Fire of 1871" on February 12 at the Mesa County Central Library, 443 N. 6th St.

**Joan Robinson**, Newcomers member who for years has volunteered to support the Salvation Army's holiday Giving Tree program, thanked Newcomers members for their generosity in sharing that support over the holidays. The Giving Tree program produced paper "tags," each one representing a child or family in need, and listing their specific wishes for Christmas gifts. Joan brought 35 tags to the November meeting -- 23 of which were chosen by Newcomers members, who then purchased gifts for the children listed. Members also donated \$1,105 in cash -- a record amount -- which Joan used to buy Giving Tree gifts. In total, Newcomers contributions -- both gifts and cash -- made it possible for 19 children to receive wished-for Christmas gifts that they would not otherwise receive.

**Susan Fournier** reported on the Armchair Travelers program, offered through a partnership between Newcomers Club and the Mesa County Public Library System. Each month local travelers share their photos and experiences in open-to-the-public presentations. Doors for Armchair Travelers talks open at 6 pm and the presentations run from 6:30-7:30 pm, before the library's 8 pm closure. **Susan**, who volunteers with Newcomers for the program, said that on February 5, Mesa County's Central Library, 443 N. 6th St., will host Steve Reed, recounting his travels to Argentina. On February 9, Cathy Joseph, who oversees Mesa County School District 51 music events, will present her travels to Israel at the Clifton branch library, 3270 D-1/2 Road.

**Karen Dreher**, Newcomers member who volunteers with KAFM Community Radio, 88.1 and 96.9, said that the station's Radio Room will host a Ben Garcia Live concert on January 16 at 7 pm. Doors open at 6:30 pm. Tickets are \$20 -- \$40 for a VIP meet-and-greet before the concert.

## **GUEST SPEAKER**

**Mike Bennett**, Grand Junction City Manager, described his role as CEO of city government, making sure that the city delivers a full slate of core services efficiently and transparently. He's been in his role for about a year, after spending 20 years in local government leadership, including a decade as Fruita City Manager. Because Grand Junction has a "council-manager" structure, City Council members are elected, but the city manager is an appointed, trained professional who reports to City Council. Bennett is responsible for ensuring that the city maintains a long-term strategic perspective, instead of making expedient decisions with unintended consequences. When problems crop up, he said, the city manager's "like a pilot in turbulence, taking a beat to check the gauges and make sure the plane's on course." The

city's strategic priorities include core services that no other organization can provide, housing, fiscal policy and positions, government transparency and accountability, and government efficiency. The city's finances are generally healthy enough to support these priorities, although in 2026 the operating budget is reduced by 14 percent, from \$359 million to \$316 million. Still, Bennett notes that this year the city's still investing in public safety (fire and police positions), completing construction of a first-ever 103,000-square-foot recreation and community center, developing a new regional recycling processing facility and providing funding to four key groups that serve unhoused people. When asked, he added that a low-awaited Costco store will make its way to Grand Junction -- "It's when, not if."

*Lois Leach, Secretary*